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ABSTRACT

In accordance with current recommendations concerning teaching reading to kindergarten children, this paper presents a kindergarten reading curriculum. Included are a description of major instructional techniques, a time-line illustrating how instruction might evolve across the school year, and finally, a battery of informal tasks for assessing reading ability at the end of the kindergarten year. (SRT)

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Teaching Reading in Kindergarten:

A Language-Experience Approach

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Occasional Paper No. 13 October 1986

Teaching Reading in Kindergarten:

A Language-Experience Approach

October 1986

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Evanston, Illinois

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TEACHING READING IN KINDERGARTEN: A LANGUAGE-EXPERIENCE APPROACH

The growth of full-day kindergarten programs across the nation and the recent trend toward accelerating basic skills instruction in the primary grades (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson, 1985) have combined to make reading in kindergarten an important issue for administrators, teachers, and parents alike. The question no longer seems to be "should reading be introduced in kindergarten?", but rather, "how should it be introduced?" That is, what instructional methods or approaches are most appropriate for teaching kindergarteners to read?

Interestingly, a recent joint statement by six professional organizations, "Literacy development and pre-first grade", puts forth an important consensus position on how reading should be taught prior to first grade (see Young Children, May, 1986, pp. 10-13). The joint statement lists several concerns and then makes recommendations. Among the concerns listed are the following:

1) Kindergarten children are often subjected to "rigid, formal pre-reading programs with inappropriate expectations and experiences for their levels of development."

2) Too much attention is focused upon isolated skill development rather than upon the integration of the language arts--speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

3) Too much emphasis is placed on standardized tests that are oftentimes inappropriate for the kindergarten child.

4) Kindergarten teachers who "conduct individualized programs without depending upon commercial readers and workbooks need to articulate for parents what they are doing and why."

Among the recommendations listed in the joint statement are the following:

1) Build instruction in reading on what the child already knows about oral language and print concepts. "Focus on meaningful experiences and meaningful language rather than merely on isolated skill development."

2) Provide reading experiences as an integrated part of a language arts program that includes speaking, listening, and writing as well.

3) Encourage risk-taking. In children's first attempts at reading and writing, teachers should accept, to a degree, what appear to be errors as part of children's natural patterns of growth and development. For example, teachers should encourage children's first attempts at writing without concern for proper letter formation or conventional spelling.

4) Use evaluative procedures that are developmentally appropriate for the children being assessed. Also,

select evaluative measures based on the objectives of the individual teacher's instructional program. (Standardized reading readiness tests do not always address this concern.)

5) "Make parents aware of the reasons for a total language program at the kindergarten level," and alert them to the limitations of standardized tests of pre-reading skills.

In line with the concerns and recommendations put forth in the joint statement, "Literacy development and pre-first grade", the present paper will outline a possible kindergarten reading curriculum. Included will be a description of major instructional techniques, a time-line illustrating how instruction might evolve across the school year, and finally, a battery of informal tasks for assessing reading ability at the end of the kindergarten year.

Instruction

Dictated Stories.

The method of "dictated experience-stories", sometimes referred to as the language-experience approach, has been used to teach children to read for at least 100 years. The method involves using children's own experiences, recorded in their own language, to teach them to read. That is, a shared experience is recounted or dictated by a group of children, written down on paper by the teacher, and then read and re-read by the children with the teacher's support.

There is no one best way to conduct a dictated experience-story lesson. Any approach that has been around for 100 years will have been adapted in different ways by those practitioners who have used it. What follows is one suggested 3-day cycle for reading a single experience-story with a group of kindergarteners.

Day 1. The teacher leads the children in a discussion of a shared experience: e.g., making popcorn, making valentine cards, watching snowflakes fall, visiting the school library or cafeteria, planting a seed, retelling the story of Columbus' voyage, etc. Following the oral discussion, the children dictate two or three sentences describing the experience, and the teacher records these few sentences in manuscript print on a large sheet of chart paper.

Making Popcorn

We made popcorn.
We made it in a popcorn popper.
We put butter and salt on the popcorn.

Next, the teacher models a reading of the completed experience-story, pointing to each word as she reads. Finally, the children join in choral reading the story several times, with the teacher continuing to point to the words on the chart paper as the group reads.

Day 2. The Day 1 story is brought out and choral-read several times, with the teacher again modeling finger-point reading. Next, some informal questions can be asked and games played with the now familiar story. For example:

- Who can come up to the chart and show me where we start reading? Where we end? Where do we go when we reach the end of a line?

- These little dots in our story are called 'periods.' What do they tell us to do?

- Who knows this word [Teacher points to 'popcorn'] ? Good! Can someone else find the same word at another place in the story?

- What is the first letter in this word [Teacher points to the p in put] ? Can you find another word in our story that begins with a p?

Day 3. On Day 3, the teacher works at a table with groups of seven to eight children at a time. The 'popcorn' story has been transferred from the large chart paper to the bottom of an 8" x 11" piece of paper, and each child at the table has a copy. The teacher reads the story several times and the children attempt to follow along on their own copy. Next, the teacher instructs the children to illustrate the 'popcorn' story on the top half of the paper. As the children begin drawing, the teacher moves around to each child and asks

him/her to finger-point read the three-line story. (Note: Early in the year, the teacher may have to use an echo-reading strategy. That is, the teacher reads one or two lines, the child attempts to "echo-read" these lines while pointing to the words on the page.) If the child is successful in finger-point reading the story--i.e., matching spoken words to written words in an appropriate manner--the teacher can afterwards point randomly to individual words in the text and see if the child can identify them, immediately, or by using context.

Kindergarten children will differ considerably in their ability to finger-point read a short, familiar text like "Making Popcorn." Therefore, the Day 3 procedure described above, aside from its instructional value, is important diagnostically. It allows the teacher to carefully observe the reading development of individual children at a low cost in time, one to two minutes spent with each child.

Big Books.

The "Big Book" or shared book-experience method (see Holdaway, 1979) is a fairly recent approach to teaching beginning reading that has been imported from New Zealand and Australia. Despite the somewhat "trendy" status big books enjoy in elementary schools of the mid-1980's, it has become clear to knowledgeable observers that this approach is a highly motivating, theoretically sound teaching method that will be around for a long time. In fact, the Big Book approach probably represents one of the most important contributions

to the beginning reading field in the last 30 years.

The big books, themselves, have two defining characteristics: a) The pictures and accompanying print are oversized (page size approximately 18" x 24") so that a large group of children sitting around a teacher can follow along visually as the teacher reads; b) the language patterns in most big books are natural and rhythmic, oftentimes featuring repetitive refrains. E.g.,

Page	
1	Once upon a time a lion couldn't find his tail.
2	He was very sad.
3	A mouse came along. Why are you sad?
4	I can't find my tail. I'll look for it.
5	The mouse looked in front of the lion.
6	The mouse looked behind the lion. But he couldn't find the lion's tail.
7	A monkey came along. Why are you sad?
8	I can't find my tail. I'll look for it.
9	The monkey looked in front of the lion.
10	The monkey looked behind the lion. But he couldn't find the lion's tail.
11	A turtle came along. Why are you sad?
12	I can't find my tail. I'll look for it.

13 The turtle looked in front of the lion.

14 The turtle looked behind the lion.

15 I bet I can find your tail. Get up Mr. Lion.

16 The lion got up.

17 You couldn't find your tail because you were sitting on it.

As one can see in "The Lion's Tail" (from Scott-Foresman's Reading Unlimited series, 1971) above, there is much repetition of reading vocabulary built into big books. However, this repetition of sight words--very important to a beginning reader --occurs in a predictable context of natural-sounding sentence patterns. As one teacher put it, "After a few pages, the book almost reads itself."

The manner in which the teacher leads the children through several readings of a big book is quite straightforward.

Day 1. The teacher introduces a new book by reading it aloud to the children and asking them questions about the story line. On a second reading, the teacher asks the children to join her in reading the story. (Note: The teacher should point to each word in the story as she reads. This models the left-to-right progression of reading and highlights the existence of word-units in the text).

Day 2. Again the story is read together as a group (one or two times) with the teacher modeling how to finger-point read.

As a follow-up activity, the teacher can work with a small group of children, observing individuals' ability to finger-point read small sections of the story (see Day 3 Dictated Stories). Or, the teacher can provide a cassette of the big book and allow individual children the opportunity to follow along on the tape as they turn the pages of the big book.

There are several similarities and two major differences between the two reading approaches discussed thus far, dictated stories and big books.

Similarities

1. Both approaches feature the use of natural language patterns to teach beginning reading as opposed to the stilted, unnatural language found in most basal preprimers.

2. In both approaches, the reading process is continually being modeled by the teacher via her finger-point reading of the text. Children benefit from models they can emulate when they are trying to master complex skills such as reading.

3. Both approaches emphasize group choral reading which minimizes the threatening aspect of learning to read. Individual children can feel protected and supported by the group as they make their first attempts at reading.

4. Both approaches rely on memory support and repetition

to move the young child into reading. If children actually come to memorize a specific dictated story or big book through repeated readings, this is seen as a positive sign. With the memory of a specific text lodged in his/her head, a child can begin to explore how that memorized text is actually represented in lines of print (e.g., which spoken lines match which printed lines; which spoken words match which printed words).

Differences

1. The language patterns found in dictated stories and big books are different. Dictated stories, by definition, contain the spoken sentence patterns of kindergarten-aged children; big books, however, contain the written sentence patterns of children's literature.

2. Dictated stories allow kindergarteners to capture and preserve shared classroom experiences by writing them down in their own language; big books, on the other hand, present new literary experiences (events, vocabulary, sentence patterns) to children.

Because of both their underlying similarities and the two important differences cited above, dictated stories and big books complement each other nicely in a beginning reading program. The consistent use of these two approaches in the kindergarten classroom will help children to develop the

following understandings about written language:

- book orientation and directionality: a book has a front and back; a page has a top and bottom; the message is carried by the print, not the pictures; the print is read from left to right and top to bottom down the page; etc.

- concept of word: the awareness of a one-to-one correspondence between written words and spoken words in a line of text; i.e., words are separated by spaces in a line of print.

- beginning consonant letter-sound use: the ability to use preceding sentence context together with an initial consonant cue to identify successfully a new word ("He huffed and he puffed and he b____ the house down.")

- sight-word acquisition: With repeated readings of dictated stories and big books, many kindergarteners will begin to acquire a small but stable sight vocabulary (words that can be read immediately in or out of sentence context).

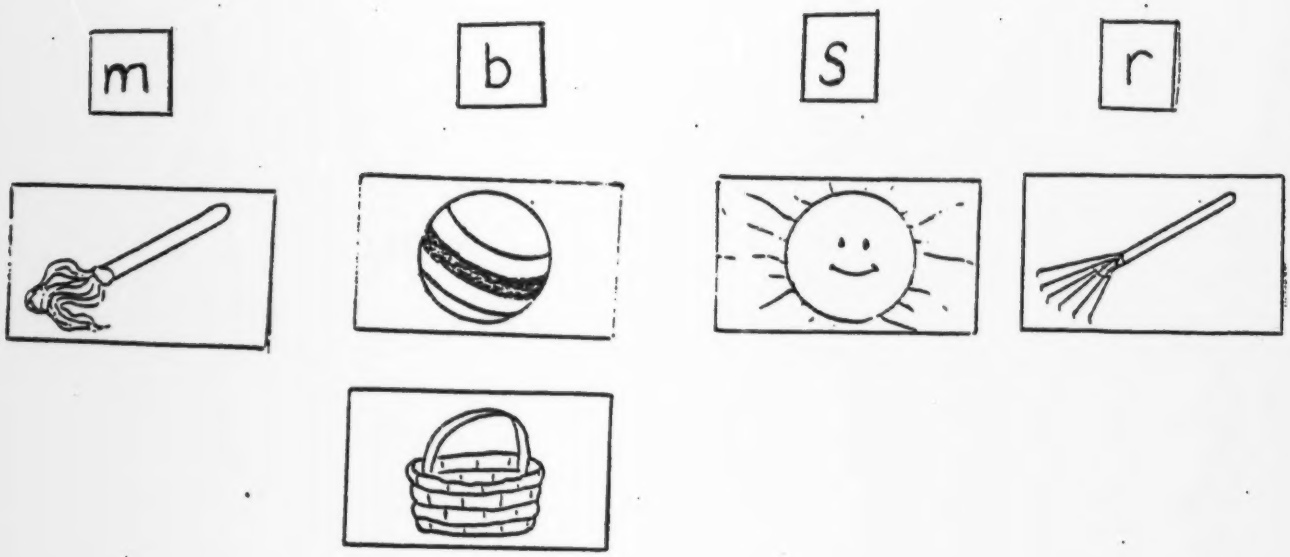
NOTE: Poems, particularly four-line Mother Goose rhymes, can be thought of as shortened versions of big books. That is, the poems can be enlarged on chart paper, illustrated, and choral-read using the procedures described above. Some teachers even turn such verses into four-page big books. The use of short poems is especially effective in introducing

reading concepts early in the kindergarten year.

Alphabet/Early Phonics.

The alphabet letters (upper and lower case) are the building blocks of our writing system. The child who is able to recognize and name these letters brings important, task-specific perceptual knowledge to the learning-to-read effort. There is no one best way to teach the alphabet. Teachers should be free to draw from a number of resources: chalkboard work, pencil and paper copying, workbooks, cut-and-paste activities, etc.

It is also important that kindergarten readers develop some knowledge of letter-sound correspondences, particularly beginning consonants. Again, commercially-produced workbooks can be used to teach beginning consonant letter-sound correspondences. However, teacher-made materials and activities are just as effective and sometimes more enjoyable for kindergarteners. For example, an excellent small group activity is to have children sort picture cards into categories by beginning consonant sound.



Once kindergarteners have acquired some knowledge of beginning consonant letter-sound correspondences, it is important that the teacher help them learn to use this knowledge in the act of reading text. Fortunately, dictated stories and big books provide a perfect medium for teaching kindergarteners to use beginning consonant cues in their contextual reading. For example, one simple but effective game involves the teacher covering (with an index card) a single word in an oft-repeated dictation or poem and having the children guess what letter the "mystery" word begins with.

We made popcorn.
We made it in a popcorn popper.
We put butter and ____ on the popcorn.

To do so, first the children must use the story and sentence context to identify the target word (a worthwhile task itself); then they must think about the beginning consonant sound in the "mystery" word and identify the alphabet letter that represents that sound (in this case, the letter s in 'salt'). At this point, the children will eagerly await the teacher uncovering the first letter in the mystery word, and upon seeing it will be justifiably proud of their problem-solving ability. This little game, played two or three times per week, can have a dramatic effect on children's tendency to use beginning consonant cues in their contextual reading.

How reading instruction might evolve across the school year

What follows is a brief outline of how classroom reading instruction might progress through the kindergarten year. An assumption is made that at various times instruction will occur in whole class, small group, and individualized contexts.

I. September (First two weeks of school)

A. Teacher does some initial diagnostic screening to determine children's reading-related knowledge.

1. Alphabet recognition. Child names a set of upper case letters that are presented in random order.

2. Alphabet production. Children in small groups write individual alphabet letters to the best of their ability as the teacher dictates the letter names.

3. Concept of word. After completing a sentence stem with the teacher's help (If I could do magic, I would ...; or, My mother is nice because she ...), the child illustrates his/her sentence. Next, the teacher models a finger-point reading of the dictated sentence and asks the child to read it, pointing to each word. After the child's finger-point reading, the teacher might point to one or two words within the sentence and see if the child can identify them. If the teacher is unsure regarding the child's concept of word in text, she should record a question mark(?) in her notebook and repeat the same sentence-reading task a day or so later.

Though other diagnostic measures could be administered at the beginning of kindergarten, the three mentioned above will give the teacher a good idea of the reading readiness levels of her students. Those youngsters who can recognize and produce nearly all of the alphabet letters and who are able to finger-point read the sentence are ready to learn how to read. Those children who lack alphabet knowledge and possess little or no awareness of word units in text will probably be slower in acquiring reading skill.

II. October - November

A. Whole-class instruction: The morning reading circle might include the following activities:

- determining "today's" date;
- filling in a weather chart;
- "show and tell";
- choral reading a poem or simple big book;
- dictating a new experience-story or re-reading an old one.

At the beginning of the year, individual children will obviously be benefitting at different levels from the experience stories and big books. Some will be fascinated by the teacher's ability to translate their spoken sentences into writing on the big chart paper; others will be coming to terms with the left-to-right progression of the writing; and a few may be learning sight words even at this early point in the school year.

B. Small group instruction: By the beginning of October, the teacher will have identified a small group of youngsters (6 or 7) who are ready for more intensive work with the experience stories and big books. This small group will meet with the teacher three or four days a week and practice finger-point reading and word-finding using the previous day's experience-story (see Dictated experience-stories - Day 3).

C. Individualized instruction: In reality, instruction is being individualized via the small group work noted above. However, one individualized activity that is appropriate at all times of the year is for the teacher or an aide to help the child write a "dictated" sentence to serve as a caption for a picture he/she has just drawn.

III. November - February

A. Whole-class instruction: The morning reading circle continues as before, but the experience-stories and big books the children are choral-reading become longer and a bit more difficult. For example, an experience-story might now be four or five lines in length as opposed to a two or three-line story in September. Beginning consonant work will have been going on in the classroom for some time now, and by mid-November, many children (not all) will have learned several beginning consonant sounds. Therefore, the teacher may decide to incorporate beginning consonant work into the whole-class experience-story lessons. For example, in taking group dictation, the teacher might stop and say,

> "Children, the next word in our sentence is 'picking'. Who can tell me what the first letter is in 'picking'?"

B. Small group instruction

1. By mid-November, the teacher will have identified

a second group of children (again, 6-7) who are ready for more intensive small group work with the experience-stories and big books. This second group will begin to meet with the teacher 3-4 times per week in 15-20 minute sessions to practice finger-point reading, finding words in context, and beginning consonant use (see Instruction section).

2. The top group, which began small group instruction in October, is ready for additional work. By Christmas break, these children will have a firm concept of word in text and, therefore, will begin to acquire a sight vocabulary as they read. The teacher may want to establish word banks for each child in this group. The procedure is simple:

   - After a dictation has been read several times in the small group, the teacher randomly orders the words in the dictation on a sheet of paper and gives each child a copy (The random ordering of words eliminates the effect of sentence context). The children's task is to circle the words they know how to read. Before leaving the group, the teacher double-checks each child's ability to read the words he/she circled. Later, the teacher transfers the circled words to individual cards (½ of a 3" x 5" index card) forming an individual word bank for each child.

A child can store his word cards in a cigar box, a fruit jar, or on a metal ring. Various games can be played with the cards, including: alphabetizing, making sentences, concentration, beginning consonant categorization, etc. These games can be played individually or in pairs.

Note: Every two weeks the teacher should check each child's ability to read his word bank cards. It is normal for some words to be missed and thus dropped from the bank. At the same time, new words should continue to enter the child's word bank as new stories are read each week. Once a child's word bank reaches 50-75 words (words that he/she can read accurately), the teacher should use her discretion as to whether to continue the activity.

3. After the Christmas break, if not before, the top group of readers should be encouraged to do some independent writing. In fact, one or two days per week in the small group could begin to be devoted to writing. At first the children might simply be asked to complete a sentence stem or to write a caption for a drawing they have completed. Of course, variations from conventional letter formation and spelling should be tolerated at this early writing stage. Later, children should be encouraged to write longer pieces. Sometimes the teacher might provide the stimulus for writing ("Things I am scared of", or "We have policemen because..."). Other times, the children should be allowed to choose their own

writing topics. The important point is this: The top group, by early January, has the prerequisite word knowledge to allow them to write. Also, the act of writing--sequencing ideas, planning sentences in their heads, analysing the sounds within a word to be spelled--will actually serve to strengthen the children's reading ability.

IV. February - May

A. Whole-class instruction: Experience-stories and big books will continue to be effective within this whole class setting. More and more children should begin to participate in this process even though longer and more difficult stories are being read in the morning reading circle.

B. Small group instruction

1. Members of the top group are now reading their experience-stories and several big books with ease. The children in this group are also more comfortable in an independent writing task, though there still exists a range of ability and motivation here.

One final reading activity can be added in the final two or three months of the year: group echo-reading of a trade book. Again, the teaching procedure is quite simple. Align the seven children around a circular table and give each child a copy

of a natural language, first grade level book (see the Storybox program). The teacher has the children follow along as she reads aloud the first one or two pages of the book. Next, the children are asked to go back and finger-point read the same two pages. The teacher can help individual children with unknown words. The group proceeds through the rest of the book in the same manner: teacher reads two pages, children echo-read the same pages, pointing to each word. On the following day, the same story could be read in a slightly different manner. That is, the teacher reads a page and then calls on one of the children to read the next page. Most of the children will be able to do so, given that they remember the story-line from the previous day. A third day's activity on the same book would be to pair the children up and let them take turns reading two pages of the story each until the story is completed. This group echo-reading strategy provides the kindergarten reader with plenty of memory support, allowing him/her to read an interesting book that may have been too hard to read independently. Obviously, chances to acquire new sight vocabulary and to practice one's phonics skills are abundant with this approach. One final note: The exact teaching procedure can be duplicated if the teacher reads

the book into a cassette tape, and then has individual children echo-read using the taped voice as a model.

2. Members of the middle group, who began small group instruction two to three months earlier should begin doing some independent writing during the last few months of the year. This group could certainly benefit from word bank activities, and they might also enjoy reading a few simple, natural language primers using the group echo-reading strategy.

3. By February or March, the teacher might feel that the lowest readiness students in her class (4 or 5) could benefit from some small group work that featured reading and re-reading favorite experience stories and poems. The goals of such instruction should be the development of a stable concept of word in text and the ability to use beginning consonant cues as an aid in identifying words. Though these are important goals, the teacher should realize that not every five year old will be developmentally ready (linguistically and cognitively) to acquire these understandings during the kindergarten year.

Assessment of Reading Ability at the End of Kindergarten

One of the areas highlighted in the recent joint statement "Literacy Development and Pre-First Grade" (see introductory

paragraphs of this paper) was evaluation. The joint statement urged kindergarten teachers to use "evaluative procedures that are developmentally appropriate for the children being assessed." It also recommended that teachers select evaluative measures based on the objectives of their individual instructional programs. If we accept this wise counsel regarding evaluation, then the first step in developing a year-end assessment strategy for our kindergarten reading curriculum is to identify specific reading concepts that have been taught (learned) during the year.

Figure 1, below, summarizes some language and print concepts that kindergarteners will learn when they participate in a year-long language-experience reading program.

Insert Figure 1

The first thing to note in Figure 1 is that the child can acquire some concepts about print (alphabet recognition, letter-sound correspondence) in somewhat isolated contexts, e.g., via chalk board or workbook drill as opposed to practice reading sentences or stories. Other print concepts (concept of word, beginning consonant use in context), however, can be acquired only through the child attempting to read connected text (printed sentences and stories). Second, a rough continuum of concept acquisition--moving from top to bottom--is implied

in Figure 1. For example, though a child need not have complete mastery of the alphabet before he/she can begin learning to discriminate beginning consonant sounds in words, alphabet knowledge is prerequisite to learning the beginning consonant sound-letter correspondences (/hair/ = h; /feet/ = f). Similarly, on the contextual side, a child must develop a concept of the spoken word-written word match in text (be able to finger-point read), before he/she will be effective in using beginning consonant cues to help identify words in a sentence.

A third point to keep in mind about Figure 1 is that it represents the whole cycle of printed word learning--from being able to name a few alphabet letters and understand that print is read from left-to-right, to being able to establish a stable sight vocabulary and to decode or "sound out" unknown words. It should go without saying that kindergarteners' abilities, at the beginning of the year, will spread out considerably along this word knowledge continuum. Some may enter knowing only how to recognize their first name and a few letters of the alphabet. Others may know most of the alphabet letters, be able to discriminate beginning consonant sounds in spoken words, and even possess a fledgling ability to finger-point read single sentences. And one or two children in the class may be beginning readers in September, possessing a small sight vocabulary and some decoding skill.

If there is a spread of reading-related knowledge at the

beginning of kindergarten, we should expect a distribution of reading ability after one year of instruction. This is a very important point. It is unrealistic to expect all kindergarteners, at the end of the year, to be at the "bottom" of Figure 1, i.e., to have established a sight vocabulary and decoding skill. A child's reading progress during the year will be determined jointly by a) the amount of print-related knowledge he begins the year with, and b) how ready the child is, cognitively and linguistically, for the instruction he receives during the year. Certainly, a few low-readiness youngsters in September will have done well if, by year's end, they have learned to write their names, learned most of the alphabet letters, and developed some book orientation knowledge. For the majority of kindergarteners, however, the following end-of-year learning outcomes should be well within reach: a) The child will be able to finger-point read several short memorized texts [concept of word] ; and b) the child will know the beginning consonant letter-sound correspondences and will attempt to use this knowledge in identifying words in context.

Assessment Tasks

A record sheet like the one shown in Figure 2 is a useful way for the teacher to organize for year-end assessment.

Insert Figure 2

The areas of print-related knowledge to be assessed are listed

across the top and the children's names down the left-hand side. The names of the children might be listed in alphabetical order or by reading group.

In many cases, the teacher will be able to fill in the chart by relying on her year-long observations of a given child's reading performance. For example: for one of the more able readers in the class, the kindergarten teacher will probably be safe in immediately checking off (✓) the first six categories: Name, Alphabet, Beginning Consonant Discrimination, Book Orientation, and Beginning Consonant Use. For this child the teacher would only have to estimate the size of his/her sight vocabulary, and then administer the Phoneme Awareness and Decoding tasks. On the other hand, for one of the least able readers in the class, the teacher might feel safe in omitting (checking off) only the Name and Book Orientation tasks. That is, she may want some year-end documentation on the child's performance in each of the remaining areas.

Below are specific tasks or strategies for assessing children's abilities in each of the print knowledge areas listed in Figure 2. (Note that the tasks could be administered at any time during the year.)

Name (Production). The child writes his/her name, first and last.

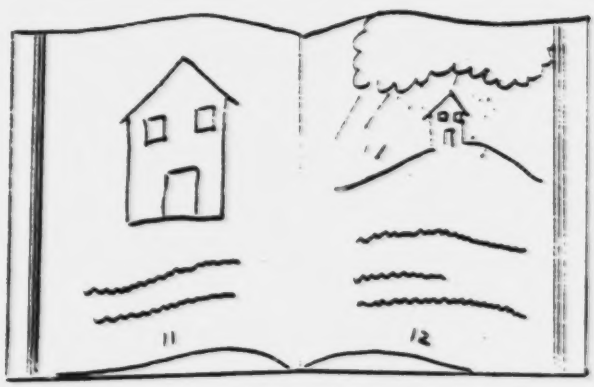
Alphabet (Recognition). The child names the alphabet letters,

upper and lower-case, as the teacher points to them in random order. (Production) The child writes the alphabet letters as the teacher dictates the letter names in random order. (see Appendix for a randomized alphabet sheet that can be used for the recognition and production tasks.) Along with recording the number of correct responses in both the recognition and production tasks, the teacher should make note of the specific letters that the child misses.

Beginning Consonant Letter-Sound Correspondences. The teacher shows the child a small card (½ of a 3" x 5" index card) with the word 'bear' printed on it. She asks the child to point to the first letter in the word. Then she asks, "What is the beginning sound in this word?" If the child answers incorrectly or does not respond, the teacher can model the correct response (/b/) and then provide a second sample item. If the child is able to produce the correct beginning sound (i.e., /b/), the teacher brings out ten more word cards and presents them one at a time. For each word card, the child is asked only one question: "What is the beginning sound in this word?" (Words: cat, sun, rabbit, lip, dog, father, window, pan, house, milk). The number of correct responses (0-10) is recorded.

Book Orientation. The teacher hands the child a book. She asks the child to identify the 'front' of the book and the 'back'. Opening the book to about page 5, the teacher asks the child to point to the 'top' of the page, and then to the

'bottom'. She then says to the child, "Let's pretend you are reading this book; show me how you turn the pages." (Answer: right to left). After the child has turned several pages in a given direction, the teacher stops him/her and says, "Okay, let's say you are right here in the book (pp. 11-12, for example); which page do you read first?" (Ans.: the left-hand page, p. 11).



The teacher now focuses the child's attention on the print on p. 11 and says, "On this page, point to where you begin reading." (Ans.: first word in first line). "Okay, if you begin reading there, show me which way you go." (Ans.: left to right across the line). "Point to where you go when you reach the end of the line." (Ans.: back to the beginning of the next line). "Point to where you go when you reach the bottom of the page." (Ans.: to the first word on the top line of the next page, p. 12).

Concept of Word. The teacher chooses a dictated story or big book that the child's group has just completed. She explains to the child that they are going to read part of the story aloud. The teacher proceeds to model a finger-point reading of the first two sentences. Then she asks the child to read the same two sentences pointing to each word.

Spring

Spring comes after winter.
3 1

In spring, the flowers come up.
2

We go outside and play in spring.

After the child's finger-point reading effort, the teacher points to individual words within the two sentences (see underlined words in story) and asks the child to identify them. The teacher notes whether the child a) identifies the words immediately, b) goes back to the beginning of the story and finger-points over to the target word (i.e., uses context), or c) is unsuccessful in identifying the words. Accurate finger-point reading and the ability to identify individual words in a few lines of print are good indicators of a child's concept of word in text. If the teacher is unsure of the diagnosis after one story, she can repeat the same two-minute assessment activity with a second story.

Beginning Consonant Use/Context. Two specific responses by

the reader can provide evidence that he/she is using beginning consonant cues plus sentence context to aid word recognition. First, the child, on coming upon a new word in the text, may hesitate and actually begin to "sound" the beginning consonant in the new word. A second response to a new, unknown word in a story might be to substitute a contextually appropriate word that contains the same beginning consonant.

(Grumble ran to the ~~hut~~ house to get his shovel.)

Though each of the above responses is a reliable indicator of beginning consonant use in contextual reading, unfortunately neither response may occur in a short assessment reading task. Therefore, the kindergarten teacher throughout the school year should be looking for (and documenting) individual children's use of beginning consonant cues in contextual reading situations.

Sight Vocabulary. There are several ways to approach the assessment of children's sight vocabulary at the end of the kindergarten year. If the teacher has been keeping word banks for individual children, she can simply conduct a year-end check on a child's mastery of the word cards in his/her bank (e.g., Tom can read 37 words in his bank, Carrie can read 22 words in her bank, etc.). A second way to assess sight vocabulary involves the teacher taking a sample of 40 or so words from the most frequently read dictated stories, big

books, and poems in the classroom. The teacher then has each child attempt to read this list of 40 words taken from stories he or she has read during the year. A less preferred alternative to the plan above would be to test each child on 40 words randomly selected from the Dolch List of 220 frequently used words.

Phoneme Awareness. In learning to read, children need to become aware of the fact that spoken words are comprised of sequences of sounds or phonemes (/man/ = /m + /ă/ + /n/; /flat/ = /f/ + /l/ + /ă/ + /t/). Furthermore, they must learn to map individual letters or letter combinations to these phonemes. Recently, researchers (e.g., Gough & Hillinger, 1980; Liberman, 1974) have clearly established that many pre-first grade children lack the ability to segment spoken words into their component phonemes. For example, the children are unable to perform simple tasks like moving two blocks to represent the two sounds in /my/, or pronouncing separately the three sounds in /sōap/. There is continued debate in the research literature over whether phoneme awareness is an important prerequisite to learning to read (Liberman & Shankweiler, 1979), or whether beginning reading instruction actually facilitates the development of phoneme awareness (Ehri, 1984; Henderson, 1986). Nonetheless, from a practitioner's or teacher's vantage point, there is good reason to assess the extent to which young children are aware of phonemes within words, particularly since there are simple, effective

ways to do so in the classroom.

A kindergarten child's awareness of beginning consonant sounds in words is easily assessed through beginning consonant "picture sorts" (see Alphabet/Early Phonics, pp. 11-12). If a child is able to sort pictures accurately into columns by their beginning consonant sound, he/she possesses phoneme awareness of the beginning consonant sound in words.

A more sophisticated measure of phoneme awareness can be obtained by having kindergarten children spell a short list of words:

1. feet	6. rice
2. mail	7. beg
3. dress	8. rich
4. stick	9. junk
5. lamp	10. comb

The teacher should begin the spelling assessment by modeling on the chalkboard a "sound-it-out" spelling of the word 'mat'.

> Children, if we are going to write the word 'mat', what letter should we write first? What do you "hear" at the beginning of 'mat'? M, good! Okay, what letter should we write next? And so on.

After spelling one or two sample words with the class, the teacher proceeds to dictate the ten-word spelling list. The children are encouraged to spell the words as best they can,

listening for what letter comes first, what comes next, and so on. Below, note how three kindergarteners might spell the list at the end of the year.

	Terry	Barbara	Curtis
1. feet	F	FT	FET
2. mail	M	MAL	MAL
3. dress	J	JS	JAS
4. stick	C	CK	STEK
5. lamp	L	LP	LAP
6. rice	-	R	RIS
7. beg	B	BG	BAG
8. rich	R	R	REH
9. junk	G	GK	JOK
10. comb	K	KM	COM

It is clear from the spelling samples, above, that Terry, Barbara, and Curtis possess different levels of phoneme awareness. Whereas Terry is aware of beginning consonant sounds in words, Barbara can attend to both the beginning and ending consonants, and Curtis is able to "sound" his way through a word, representing not only the consonants, but also the vowel element. One could predict from these spelling results that Curtis is the more advanced reader of the three children, in all probability possessing a stable concept of word and a small sight vocabulary.

Kindergarteners' early spelling attempts or "invented

spellings," as they are sometimes referred to, can provide rich diagnostic information to the observant teacher. For those readers interested in a more in-depth treatment of the "invented spelling" phenomenon (e.g., explanations of why Curtis spelled dress with a J or why he substituted E for I in stick and rich), see Morris (1981) or Morris and Perney (1984). (A final note: The teacher should be conscious of the fact that a child's ability to invent spellings, to display his/her phoneme awareness in written form, depends on the prerequisite skill of being able to write the letters of the alphabet.)

Decoding Ability. Decoding ability, the kindergarten child's skill in "sounding-out" unknown words, can be assessed by having him/her attempt to read the following list of short vowel words:

1. cap	6. mop
2. net	7. led
3. win	8. dig
4. bug	9. job
5. fat	10. mud

Though the teacher should encourage the child to attempt to read each of the words, she should also anticipate this being a frustrating task for most of her kindergarteners, even at the end of the year. Only those children possessing a sight vocabulary and considerable phoneme awareness will be successful in this decoding task.

We are now ready to examine the performance of three different children (see Figure 2) on the entire assessment battery. Curtis, one of the more able readers in the class, could read 52 of the words in his word bank, and also could read 20 of the 40 words on the teacher-constructed sight word list. Curtis' spellings revealed his awareness of both beginning and ending consonants and medial vowels in words. Finally, Curtis was able to read correctly eight of the ten words on the decoding test. Because of Curtis' demonstrated ability during the year, the teacher administered only the sight vocabulary, spelling, and decoding tasks to this child.

Barbara, a member of the middle reading group in the kindergarten class, was administered the entire battery with the exception of the name and book orientation tasks. She was able to read 13 of the 15 words in her word bank, but she knew only 6 of the 40 words on the sight word test. Barbara represented beginning and ending consonants in her spellings, but seemed to lack conscious awareness of the vowel element in spoken words. She was also unsuccessful in decoding the ten short vowel words, though she did make a "stab" at several of them ('dog' for dig; 'big' for bug; and 'not' for net).

Finally, Terry, one of the least able readers in the class, was administered the entire battery. Terry's performance profile does show some important strengths. This child has a good deal of alphabet knowledge, he understands how

print works (see Book Orientation), and he knows the beginning consonant letter-sound correspondences. Terry is beginning to develop a concept of word in text, but he needs further practice in this important area. The teacher did not keep individual word banks for Terry's reading group. As for his low sight vocabulary, phoneme awareness, and decoding scores, these are to be expected given the emergent state of Terry's reading ability.

From the profiles of the three children above, one can begin to perceive the potential of such a developmental assessment of end-of-year kindergarten reading ability. From such an assessment, a kindergarten teacher can document the print-related knowledge that her students have acquired during the year. Furthermore, she can pass this assessment information on to the first grade teachers who will be teaching reading to the children the following school year.

Concluding Remarks

In considering a possible kindergarten reading curriculum, this paper has a) described a few instructional techniques, b) outlined how such instruction might evolve over the school year, and c) suggested a strategy for assessing specific learning outcomes. No attempt will be made here to summarize what has been a fairly lengthy, descriptive account. However, an important caveat is warranted. This paper has been written with a specific audience, in fact, a specific school system in mind. Several characteristics of this school system have led

to a priori assumptions on this author's part that have certainly influenced the nature of the kindergarten reading program described. Below are listed these school system characteristics, particularly as they are manifested at the kindergarten level:

- middle to upper-middle class population
- small class size (18-20 children)
- the expectation (by parents, teachers, and administrators) that reading will be taught in kindergarten.
- the willingness of teachers to subgroup for reading instruction.
- the reality that teachers are held accountable at year's end for documenting the reading progress their students have made.

In making generalizations from the content of this paper, one should keep firmly in mind the educational context for which it was written, i.e., the school system characteristics listed above. This is not to say that the theoretical underpinnings and some specific aspects of the curriculum described will not generalize to other contexts, to other kindergarten classrooms. The point is that given a very different context (e.g., an inner-city Head Start program) the author would have written a different paper.

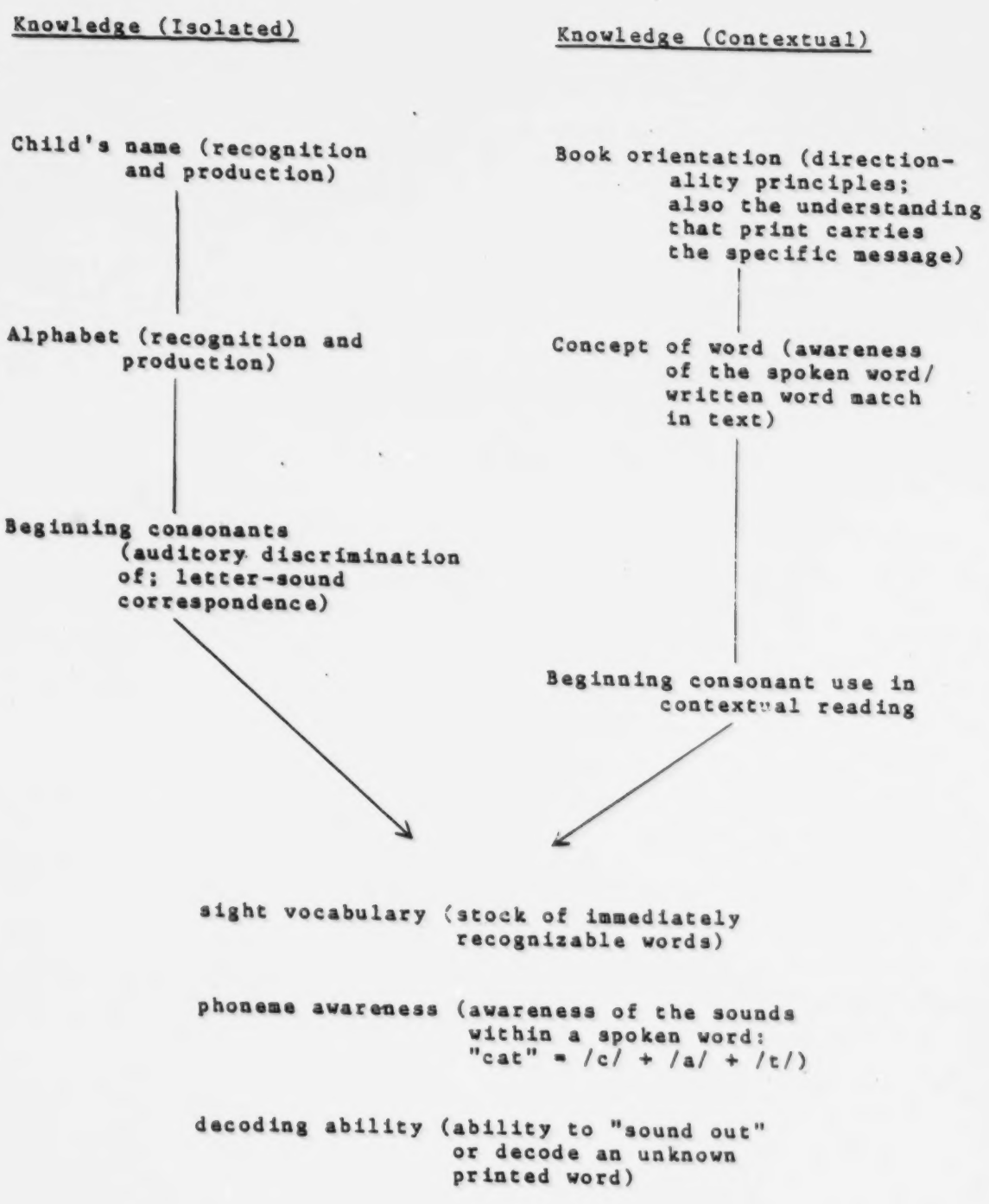

Knowledge (Isolated)
Knowledge (Contextual)
Child's name (recognition and production)
Book orientation (directionality principles; also the understanding that print carries the specific message)
Alphabet (recognition and production)
Concept of word (awareness of the spoken word/written word match in text)
Beginning consonants (auditory discrimination of; letter-sound correspondence)
Beginning consonant use in contextual reading
sight vocabulary (stock of immediately recognizable words)
phoneme awareness (awareness of the sounds within a spoken word: "cat" = /c/ + /a/ + /t/)
decoding ability (ability to "sound out" or decode an unknown printed word)

Figure 1. Print-related concepts important in the learning-to-read process.

	NAME		ALPHABET			BEG. CON. L-S	BOOK ORIENTATION				CONCEPT OF WORD		BEG. CON. USE	SIGHT VOCAB.		PHON. AWARE (SPELLING)			DE-CODING
			RECOG.		PROD.		BOOK	PAGE		PRINT	PT.	WD.							
	REC.	PROD.	UP	LOW	EITHER	CORR.	FR/BK	T/B	L/R	L/R		I.D.	CXT.	BANK	TEST	BEG	B-E	B-H-E	
1.																			
2. Curtis	✔	✔	26	26	26	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	52 words	20 of 40	✔	✔	✔	8 of 10
3.																			
4.																			
5.																			
6.																			
7.																			
8.																			
9. Barbara	✔	✔	26	23	26	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	13 words	6 of 40	✔	✔	X	0 of 10
10.																			
11.																			
12.																			
13.																			
14.																			
15.																			
16. Terry	✔	✔	24	19	20	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	shaky	X	No word bank	1 of 40	✔	X	X	0 of 10
17.																			
18.																			

Figure 2. Assessment of print-related knowledge.

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